AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Original) A method for processing a mail item comprising:

determining if the mail item is provided with tracking identification information including at least one of an identifier associated with a sender of the mail item and an identifier associated with equipment used to generate the mail item, the tracking identification information further including a unique identification number;

if the mail item is provided with tracking identification information, associating the tracking identification information with a unique aspect of the mail item;

generating a record of the association between the tracking identification information and the unique aspect of the mail item; and

providing the mail item to a carrier for delivery.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein determining if the mail item is provided with tracking identification information further comprises:

scanning the mail item to determine if the mail item is provided with tracking identification information.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein determining if the mail item is provided with tracking identification information further comprises:

manually inspecting the mail item to determine if the mail item is provided with tracking identification information.

4. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes an employee identification number.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes a user name.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes biometric information.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes at least a portion of a credit card number.

8. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes at least a portion of a driver's license number.

9. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the tracking identification information is printed on the mail item.

10. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the tracking identification information is printed on a label affixed to the mail item.

11. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the tracking identification information is encrypted, and determining if the mail item is provided with tracking identification information further comprises:

decrypting the encrypted tracking identification information.

12. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the tracking identification information is digitally signed, and determining if the mail item is provided with tracking identification information further comprises:

verifying the digital signature.

13. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the unique aspect of the mail item includes an indicium generated for the mail item.

14. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the unique aspect of the mail item includes a destination address of the mail item.

15. (Original) The method of claim 14, wherein the unique aspect of the mail item further includes a date of processing the mail item.

16. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the unique aspect of the mail item includes an image of the mail item.

17. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein generating a record further comprises:

storing the record in a database.

18. (Original) The method according to claim 17, wherein storing the record in a database further comprises:

encrypting the record and storing the encrypted record in the database.

19. (Original) The method according to claim 17, wherein storing the record in a database further comprises:

digitally signing the record and storing the digital signature along with the record in the database.

20. (Original) The method of claim 17, wherein before providing the mail item to a carrier, the method further comprises:

destroying the tracking identification information provided on the mail item.

21. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein generating a record further comprises:

combining the tracking identification information with the unique aspect of the mail item;

encrypting the combination of the tracking identification information and the unique aspect of the mail item; and

affixing the encrypted combination to the mail item.

22. (Original) The method of claim 21, wherein affixing the encrypted combination to the mail item further comprises:

printing the encrypted combination on the mail item.

23. (Original) The method of claim 21, wherein affixing the encrypted combination to the mail item further comprises:

including the encrypted combination within a postage indicium generated for the mail item.

24. (Original) The method of claim 21, further comprising:

digitally signing the encrypted combination before affixing the encrypted combination to the mail item.

25. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein before providing the mail item to a carrier, the method further comprises:

determining the sender's name based on the tracking identification information;

encrypting the sender's name; and

affixing the encrypted sender's name to the mail item.

26. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the tracking identification information is a barcode.

27. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the tracking identification information further includes an indication of special services requested for the mail item.

28. (Currently Amended) A method for processing a mail item comprising:

receiving a request for tracking identification information from a sender for the mail item;

generating a postage indicium for the mail item;

generating the tracking identification information, the tracking identification information including at least one of an identifier associated with the sender and an identification associated with equipment from which the request is made, the tracking identification information further including a unique identification number, at least a portion of the postage indicium being used as the unique identification number;

generating a record associating the identification associated with the sender and the postage indicium;

storing the record; and

returning the tracking identification information to the sender for affixing to the mail item.

29. (Original) The method of claim 28, wherein receiving a request for tracking information further comprises:

receiving authentication information from the sender;

determining if the authentication information is valid; and

if the authentication information is valid, generating the tracking identification information.

30. (Original) The method of claim 29, wherein the authentication information includes at least one of a user name and password.

31. (Original) The method of claim 29, wherein the authentication information includes at least one of an employee identification number and password.

32. (Original) The method of claim 29, wherein the authentication information includes biometric information.

33. (Original) The method of claim 29, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes a least a portion of the authentication information.

34. (Original) The method of claim 29, further comprising:

retrieving the identifier associated with the sender based on the authentication information.

35. (Original) The method of claim 28, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes an employee identification number.

36. (Original) The method of claim 28, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes a user name.

37. (Original) The method of claim 28, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes biometric information.

38. (Original) The method of claim 28, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes at least a portion of a credit card number.

39. (Original) The method of claim 28, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes at least a portion of a driver's license number.

40. (Original) The method of claim 28, wherein generating the tracking identification information further comprises:

encrypting the tracking identification information.

41. (Original) The method of claim 28, wherein generating the tracking identification information further comprises:

digitally signing the tracking identification information.

42. (Original) The method of claim 28, wherein the request is received from a remote workstation.

43. (Original) The method of claim 28, wherein the tracking identification information is generated within a workstation being used by the sender.

44. (Original) The method according to claim 28, further comprising:

storing information related to the request for tracking identification information.

45. (Original) The method according to claim 44, wherein the information related to the request includes a date and time of the request.

46. (Original) The method according to claim 44, wherein the information related to the request includes an identification of a workstation from which the request was made.

47. (Original) The method according to claim 44, wherein the information related to the request includes an identification of a printer on which at least a portion of the mail item was printed.

48. (Original) The method according to claim 28, further comprising:

printing the tracking identification information on the mail item.

49. (Original) The method according to claim 28, further comprising:

printing the tracking identification information on a label for affixing to the mail item.

50. (Original) The method of claim 28, wherein the request for tracking identification information includes a code that describes the mail item contents.

51. (Canceled)

52. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 2851, further comprising:

encoding the identifier associated with the sender into the postage indicium.

53. (Canceled)

54. (Original) The method according to claim 28, wherein the tracking identification information further includes an indication of special services requested for the mail item.

55. (Original) A method for processing a mail item comprising:

receiving a request for tracking identification information from a sender for the mail item;

generating the tracking identification information, the tracking identification information including a unique identifier;

encrypting the tracking identification information;

generating a record associating the unique identifier with an identification associated with the sender;

storing the record in a database; and

returning the encrypted tracking identification to the sender for affixing to the mail item.

56. (Original) The method of claim 55, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes an employee identification number.

57. (Original) The method of claim 55, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes a user name.

58. (Original) The method of claim 55, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes biometric information.

59. (Original) The method of claim 55, wherein generating the tracking identification information further comprises:

digitally signing the tracking identification information.

60. (Original) A method for processing a mail item comprising:

generating tracking identification information for affixing to the mail item, the tracking identification information including at least one of an identifier associated with a sender of the mail item and an identifier associated with equipment used to

generate the mail item, the tracking identification information further including a unique identification number and a digital signature;

verifying the digital signature;

if the digital signature is verified, associating the tracking identification information with a unique aspect of the mail item;

generating a record of the association between the tracking identification information and the unique aspect of the mail item; and

storing the record.

61-65. (Canceled)

66. (Original) A mail processing system for a central mail room comprising:

a server, the server including a sequence number generator;

a plurality of workstations coupled to the server, each of the plurality of workstations being operable by a sender of a mail item to request tracking identification information from the server, the tracking identification information including at least one of an identifier associated with the sender of the mail item and an identifier associated with the workstation being operated by the sender, the tracking identification information further including a unique identification number generated by the sequence number generator; and

a mailing machine to process mail items for delivery to a carrier,

wherein when a mail item is processed by the mailing machine, the tracking identification information affixed to the mail item is associated with a unique aspect of the mail item and a record of the association between the tracking identification information and the unique aspect of the mail item is stored in a database associated with the mailing machine, thereby allowing the sender of the mail item to be identified.

67. (Original) The system of claim 66, wherein the identifier associated with the workstation includes an identification of a printer used to print at least a portion of the mail item.

68. (Original) The system of claim 66, wherein the tracking identification information is printed on the mail item as a barcode, and the mailing machine further comprises:

an associated scanner to scan the barcode.

69. (Original) The system of claim 66, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes an employee identification number.

70. (Original) The system of claim 66, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes a user name.

71. (Original) The system of claim 66, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes biometric information.

72. (Original) The system of claim 66, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes at least a portion of a credit card number.

73. (Original) The system of claim 66, wherein the identifier associated with the sender includes at least a portion of a driver's license number.

74. (Original) The system of claim 66, wherein the tracking identification information is encrypted.

75. (Original) The system of claim 66, wherein the tracking identification information includes a digital signature.

76. (Original) The system of claim 66, wherein the record of the association between the tracking identification information and the unique aspect of the mail item is encrypted and digitally signed before being stored in the database associated with the mailing machine.